

# Facility Gives Inmates a Head Start

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**By Amy Bartner,**

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PLAINFIELD, Ind. -- Many of the state's inmates have never had a checking account. Others don't know how to interview for a job -- or even how to look for one.

So when prisoners are released into society, the transition might be tough to make, enough to force them back into a life of crime.

It's a cycle officials with the Indiana Department of Correction hope to break with a new rehabilitation facility in Plainfield.

"For years in corrections, we've locked folks up, and at the end, we opened doors and said, 'Good luck,' " Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue said at the program's grand opening Wednesday. "Well, it's a tough world out there if you don't have support behind you."

The Plainfield Re-Entry and Educational Facility, formerly the Indiana Boys School, opened in mid-January as an option to offenders nearing the end of their terms. They spend 18 to 24 months learning how to acclimate to life on the outside. The facility is now less than half full, holding 179 people who are learning trades, getting job-search assistance and continuing their educations.

More than 16,000 people will be released from DOC prisons this year, and of those, an estimated 39.3 percent will return to the system within three years.

With the re-entry facility, Donahue said, he hopes to lower that rate by 5 percent and, in turn, save Indiana taxpayers \$80 million a year.

"We are going to keep score, and we'll learn what we do well," Donahue said. "And we'll also report our failures."

Damian Golder, 28, sentenced to 21 months for probation violation and possession of cocaine, has served five months of his sentence at the re-entry facility. The father of two has learned to pour concrete and said he values the respect he's received from the staff.

"You've got a little more freedom than anywhere else," he said as he sat in his interpersonal communications class. "You can walk around, lift some weights, shoot some pool."

Golder said he has yet to find a job but plans to continue his education.

"I'm more focused on getting a job now," he said. "Probably the main problem is getting back on the streets without anything."

The residents apply for admission to the program and must have a history of good behavior to enroll. The program doesn't accept sex offenders.

Staff members call the people held in the facility residents instead of inmates because that's how they're viewed, program maintenance supervisor Carl Brown said.

"I would recommend them to anyone on the outside," he said. "A lot of it is letting them get self-respect back."

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### **It's a Partnership**

The Plainfield Re-Entry Education Facility has partnered with several entities. Among them:

- Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles, which helps offenders obtain identification cards or driver's licenses.
- Department of Workforce Development, which is providing job guidance.
- Lincoln Bank, which is helping inmates set up and manage bank accounts.
- Indiana State Department of Health, which helps inmates obtain birth certificates and offers classes in disease management and nutrition.
- Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, which is offering courses in various trades.

Source: Indiana Department of Correction

### **About The Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.